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## OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG MEN IN JAMAICA.

BY HIS EXCELLENCY, SIR HENRY A. BLAKE, GOVERNOR OF  
JAMAICA.

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THE Jamaica International Exhibition which was opened by H. R. H. Prince George of Wales in January, 1891, and remained open until May, resulted in the influx of a considerable number of observing visitors, and the dissemination of a large amount of information, through the English and American press, as to the island, its beauties, its progress and its capabilities. The interest aroused on both sides of the Atlantic has been shown by numerous letters received by me and by others in the colony asking for further information, especially as to the prospects of success for young men desirous of trying their fortune amid the beautiful surroundings so often described, but whose infinite variety baffles the power of words to fully paint.

These inquirers resolve themselves into two divisions—those who have capital and those who have none. To the latter I have always replied that there is no opening for them. The inquirer with capital I have advised to come to Jamaica, and to spend at least twelve months in examining the different parts of the island before investing his money. If he can get temporary employment on an “estate” or on a “pen,” so much the better. He will learn how to deal with the people, and also find out if the climate suits him for practical work. It must be remembered that visiting a tropical country is very different to working in it, even though the work be simply supervision. If he is satisfied, he can then choose whether he will invest in the purchase of a “pen,” and become a breeder of cattle, horses or mules, or all three; or whether he will purchase an “estate,” that is, a property on which the business is the cultivation of sugar, coffee, fruit or fibre.

As to the kind of crops that can be produced in Jamaica, if we leave out the cereals, wheat, barley, and oats, the island will produce anything that can be grown in the North American continent. Its soil, elevation, and climate are so diversified that while sugar-cane and pine-apples are growing in the plains, English gorse is in bloom in the high hills, and wild strawberries abound on all the mountain paths.

It is not my intention to go into particulars of the various crops that now form the staple exports of Jamaica. Suffice it to say that they pay the growers well, when the profits are not swallowed up in the expenses attending the management of properties belonging to absentees. The average cost of management and commissions on such properties is about 20 per cent., at least one-half of which could be saved to a resident and industrious owner. But the crops may be divided into two broad divisions, those that pay best when grown extensively, and those suitable for small proprietors, of whom over fifty thousand are to be found in Jamaica. In the former category we will have sugar, bananas, coffee, cacao, oranges, tobacco; and in the near future I hope to see the cultivation of the *agave rigida*, or sisal-hemp plant, extend. Small growers can profitably produce ginger, nutmegs, maize, tomatoes, yams, onions, potatoes and other vegetables suitable for the Canadian or American markets.

Grapes grow as freely as in California, and only require careful cultivation to yield very large returns. All these crops are capable of enormous expansion, but the carelessness of our people prevents their growing them with as much profit as might be made. The Jamaica oranges are the best in the world; there is no systematic care taken of their growing, picking, sizing and packing, as there is in Florida. So far there has been no attempt to grow separately the different kinds of banana, although the trade has expanded in ten years from the export value of £44,215 to £531,726.

There are large cocoanut walks in the island. The nuts are sold for about three-fifths of the price given for Baracoa nuts. No care is taken, as in Mauritius and elsewhere, to thin the branches as grapes are thinned, and thus give room for the nuts to grow. Everything is left to nature, and so bounteous is she that she yields with lavish hand, paying returns in defiance of a system that violates every canon of successful agriculture.

But, it may well be asked, if there are all these opportunities for the investment of capital, how comes it that while young Englishmen flock to Manitoba or Nebraska, the Cape, New Zealand, or Australia, undeterred by distance or climate, and ready to begin a hard struggle by building a log hut, they neglect the island of Jamaica, in which they may find houses ready built, fences ready made, and fields that only require the ordinary annual operation for putting in the crop? and, further, how is it that the owners of these valuable properties are so ready to part with them for a small consideration?

The answer is simple. When the work of a slave, with interest upon his value, could be had for about fifteen pounds a year, and when sugar sold at sixty pounds per ton, it paid for the reckless extravagance of the vicious and riotous living of many of the local managers and owners. It paid for the appalling waste of human life. Cargoes of young men came out year after year, and were plunged into a fiery furnace of temptation that only a moral hero could withstand. By scores and hundreds the yellow fever claimed them, and if men lived now as they lived then it may be assumed that yellow fever would become a perennial scourge. But the absentee owner in England drew a princely income and asked no questions. With falling markets incomes fell, and the manumission of the slaves accelerated the downward movement. Some managers refused to accept the dictum that emancipation involved the right to abstain from labor. They could not realize that to a slave whose life had been one long weary round of coerced labor relaxation from work must have been the greatest happiness, and they drove from the estates the people who, from the first ecstasy of freedom, refused to give for a daily wage the same steady labor they had erstwhile yielded to the persuasion of the cowhide. Others claimed exorbitant rents for the mud hovels in which the now free laborers resided. Six shillings and eightpence per week for each inmate over ten years of age was\* a not uncommon claim made for the rent of hovels, the erection of which had not originally cost a pound. The consequences might have been easily foretold by people less stupidly blind. Already great numbers of negroes had cleared patches in the unclaimed forests that clothed the hills. The people thus

\*"Letter to the Marquis of Normanby relative to the state of Jamaica, by the Marquis of Sligo," 1839.

driven off joined their friends in the interior and there laid the foundation for the peasant proprietary that is now so marked a feature in the social economy of Jamaica.

It was not long before the income of the absentee owner approached the vanishing point, and at length calls for remittances from him to enable his agent to square accounts were not uncommon. Then in some cases properties were abandoned ; in others they were sold for nominal sums to the local manager or overseer ; and many have been kept on, just managing to pay a very small sum to the owner, the returns being absorbed in the payment of local supervision and charges.

All this took place during the past generation. It is only fifty years since steam communication between England and Jamaica was established, and not one proprietor in a hundred thought it worth his while to make the voyage. The belief was accepted that property in Jamaica was valueless, and the memory of the young men who had died on the sugar estates in endless succession, and the recurring epidemics of yellow fever among the white troops, who were fed and clothed and overcrowded with all the ignorant brutality of our military system of fifty years ago, stamped the island in the opinion of the English people as a white man's grave, to be carefully avoided. Hitherto no special means have been taken to dispel these illusions. Now, that soldiers are treated on more rational principles, the reports of the army medical officers show that Jamaica is almost the healthiest station for the British troops out of the United Kingdom, while the general health of the community is shown by the vital statistics, which give the average death rate per thousand for the past seven years as 23.9, a very low rate when it is remembered that the death rate of black children under five is abnormally high.

But old beliefs die hard, and years after the extraordinary beauties of Jamaica had been described and its capabilities demonstrated by visitors who had braved the climatic superstition and found here renewed health and strength, properties were being sold for less than the value of the stock that was on them, or in some cases for a tenth of the value of the logwood that grew upon them.

A "pen" is usually divided into guinea-grass, common pasture and "wood and ruinate." The average value would be four pounds for guinea-grass per acre, two pounds for common

pasture and one pound for "wood and ruinate." It is not possible to give an average value for estates for crop cultivation, as everything depends upon position, soil, and water capabilities. At present mules are the best-paying stock. A three-year-old mule can be bred for seven and eight pounds. The average selling price is about seventeen pounds.

As to estates for the cultivation of crops, granting the proper condition of climate and soil, the yield will depend upon the industry and ability of the manager. In the cultivation of crops there are so many possible leakages that the fool and his money soon part.

But, besides the cultivation of the land, there are other ways of making money. The exhibition has shown that Jamaica has a large quantity of ochres that if treated on the spot would pay a fair dividend. The island also possesses pottery clay as good as any in England. The difficulty is that of obtaining skilled labor. A local company started a pottery, and trained workmen were imported from England. But English tradesmen seem unable to resist the seductions of cheap rum in the tropics. The two leading hands spent their time between the lock-up and the gutters; the terra-cotta works are suspended, and the problem of reliable skilled labor that will last long enough to teach our own more sober people is still to be solved.

I find that I have not said anything upon an important factor—labor. To the question as to the abundance of labor, there will be as many answers as there are differences of disposition of employers. To secure a fair day's work the eye of the master is necessary, but I am satisfied that there is no necessity for apprehension on the score of labor.

I have put aside all temptations to embark in description of the beauties of Jamaica, and confined myself to a slight sketch of some of its capabilities; so that young men may realize that here, within a three days' sea-journey from the United States, there is a British island where money can be made, where the climate is healthy, and where life and property are as secure as on any portion of the American continent.

It is necessary to emphasize the fact that the people are singularly law-abiding, and that there is an entire absence of the reported crimes that, if true, disgrace the Southern States of America, for there is a tendency of many writers to jump to

general conclusions as to the negroes, from limited observations. I find the following passage in a book by Philip A. Bruce on "The Plantation Negro as a Freeman," published in New York. Having spoken of the reverting of the Haytian negro to African tribal customs, he says :

"Jamaica has sunk to an equally hopeless condition. One of the fairest parts of the globe, a part upon which nature has lavished without stint her greatest treasures and beauties, has declined to a tropical wilderness far more wretched, with its evidence of former prosperity, than when the foot of Columbus first touched the shores of San Salvador."

Now I can only say that this is ridiculously untrue. The aggregate amount of land in cultivation has been steadily increasing since the date of emancipation, and is still increasing. In 1870 there were 1,832,386 acres in cultivation. In 1890 there were 1,896,290, and, while there is still ample room for improvement there is much reason for satisfaction with the social advance of the people. They are fulfilling their duties as citizens quietly and well, and there are no grounds for apprehension that they will retrograde from their present position. Jamaica, beautiful, healthy, and fertile, with a law-abiding population, and a good supply of labor, offers opportunities for investment that only require to be known to secure an influx of industrious capitalists whose advent must accelerate her material progress.

HENRY A. BLAKE.